



& Workers' Liberty Solidarity

For social ownership of the banks and industry

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AGAINST TORY BREXIT FOR A WORKERS' EUROPE

Why campaign to stop Brexit?

To uphold the rights of the three million EU migrants currently in Britain, our workmates, our neighbours, our friends, our fellow trade-unionists. To defend their right to reunite their families. To sustain the right of others across Europe to come to work and live in Britain, and the right of British-born people to go to work and live in Europe.

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Fighting left antisemitism in the 1980s

Pull-out



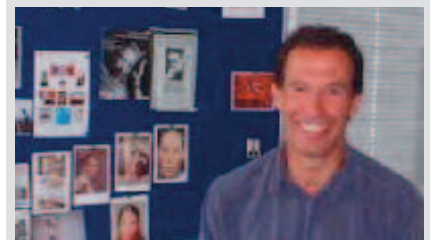
The Football Lads' Alliance and the far right



Will Sefton examines the Football Lads Alliance and their role in the UK far-right

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Robert Fine 1945-2018



We remember Robert Fine, one of the leading socialist writers of the last 40 years

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Join Labour!

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EU left refuses to condemn Russian abuse

By Dale Street

On 14 June the left bloc in the European Parliament voted against a motion demanding Russia release Ukrainian filmmaker Oleg Sentsov and 70 other Ukrainian political prisoners.

It was official policy of the left bloc, GEU/NGL, to vote against the motion. Only six members of the 52-strong faction rebelled: five by voting for, and one by abstaining. The GUE/NGL has not issued a statement explaining its opposition to the motion.

485 MEPs voted for the motion. 76 voted against. And 66 abstained.

Those who voted against the motion were almost entirely members of the far right factions in the European Parliament (ENF and EFDD) — or members of the “far left” GUE/NGL.

HALFWAY

The GUE/NGL includes traditional Stalinist parties (e.g. Portuguese and Cypriot Communist Parties) and the “new Left” (e.g. Syriza and Podemos), with the German Die Linke and French Left Front halfway between the two.

In the 2014 European Parliament elections parties affiliated to the GUE/NGL increased their share of the vote by 150%. Their share of seats in the Parliament increased from 4.5% to 7%, amounting to 52 seats.

On the day of the vote

GUE/NGL's Twitter account did carry posts highlighting: GUE/NGL opposition to Israel's oppression of Palestinians; support for a boycott of Israeli companies; Bahrain's imprisonment of a human rights activist; Myanmar's repression of the Rohingya.

But anything condemning Russia's suppression of human and democratic rights? No.

Oleg Sentsov was arrested in Crimea in May 2014, shortly after Russia's annexation of the peninsula. In 2015 he was sentenced to 20 years imprisonment on spurious charges of terrorism.

Sentsov is serving his sentence in the “White Bear” prison colony in the north of the Arctic Circle. He has now been on hunger strike for over a month, demanding his own release and the release of other political prisoners.

The 14 June resolution also condemned Russia's use of manufactured charges, torture, and inhuman prison conditions in its ongoing attempts to crush opposition to its annexation of the Crimea.

It concluded with 27 demands, covering the release of political prisoners, an end to the harassment of human rights activists and investigative journalists, respect for human rights in the Crimea and in Russia itself, an end to Russia's crackdown on NGOs in receipt of financial assistance from abroad.

Putin's regime is profoundly anti-democratic. It promotes and glorifies an authoritarian strong state, Russian chauvinism, ultra-conservative social values, social



Oleg Sentsov is now on hunger strike

and economic inequality, contempt for human rights, the (often physical) elimination of all forms of dissent, military adventures and imperialist expansion.

It is a regime which the parties affiliated to the ENF and EFDD hanker to create in their own countries. Not a few of them have also been bankrolled by the Russian government.

Why is the GUE/NGL not opposing Putin's regime?

PRO-RUSSIA

In the period 2014/2015, following Russia's annexation of the Crimea and the Russian-backed “uprising” in Eastern Ukraine, the GUE/NGL voted against an estimated 78% of motions in the European Parliament which condemned Russian military intervention and human rights

abuses.

Members of the GUE/NGL spoke against the imposition of sanctions on Russia because they were supposedly dictated by the United States.

In debates on the war in Syria in late 2015 the GUE/NGL again took a pro-Russian position.

The GUE/NGL's voting pattern in the European Parliament is a continuation of the Putin-apologist policies pursued by its affiliates in their own countries.

Leaders of Die Linke in Germany have claimed that the Maidan uprising of 2013/14 was financed by the US, Ukrainian political activists were trained in an institute named after Joseph Goebbels, and the Ukrainian state symbol of the trident was a Nazi symbol.

In 2014 Die Linke sent observers to the sham Crimean referendum

staged under conditions of Russian military occupation. It followed this up by meeting with leaders of the so-called Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) and organising ‘humanitarian aid’ for the DPR.

Last year's congress of Die Linke overwhelmingly voted down a motion which sought to condemn Russia's annexation of the Crimea and its military intervention in Eastern Ukraine.

The GUE/NGL has rightly been condemned for lining up with the far right factions in the European Parliament. The conduct of the GUE/NGL would have been no less outrageous even if the far right factions had, for reasons of their own political calculations, abstained or voted for the motion.

There is also something quite racist — or at least extremely chauvinist — about the refusal of the GUE/NGL and its affiliates to condemn the systematic repression of human rights in the Crimea and Russia.

For the GUE/NGL, citizens of Western Europe are entitled to the protection of “EU principles and values, such as the rule of law, democracy and fundamental rights.” Indeed, such principles and values need to be reinforced.

Russians and the victims of Russian annexation, on the other hand, have a more limited choice: accept the status of victims of state authoritarianism; or be ignored — or denounced, by the GUE/NGL as agents of US imperialism — if they challenge that authoritarianism.

Tatchell arrested for LGBT+ Chechens

QNEWS

By Elizabeth Butterworth

While he isn't perfect and I don't idolise him, Peter Tatchell is one of my heroes. He has consistently put his own safety on the line for the sake of human rights, especially LGBT+ rights.

In 2007 he suffered brain damage and lost sight in one of his eyes after being beaten by Russian Nazis. In 1973, he attended the World Youth Festival in East Berlin and after taking the stage to speak about gay rights in East Germany, he was interrogated by the Stasi, and threatened and assaulted by delegates from the Communist Parties.

Last week Tatchell was briefly detained in Moscow after holding a one-man protest about the treatment of LGBT+ people in Chechnya.

He was arrested for holding a placard reading “Putin fails to act against Chechnya torture of gay people.”

During the World Cup, even one-person protests have been banned in some areas.

Tatchell was released after about an hour. He was able to fly back to Britain but is due to appear in court on 26 June.

Head of the Chechen Republic, Ramzan Kadyrov, has said that LGBT+ rights activists “make up nonsense for money.”

In a BBC interview in January, he said, “All those who defend human rights groups, and the gays we supposedly have in the Chechen Republic, are foreign agents. They've sold out their country, their people, their religion — everything.”

According to Amnesty International, in 2017 over a hundred gay men have been rounded up, abducted, tortured and even killed. A year after the “gay purge”, no one has been held to account over the crimes.

In an interview with HBO in July 2017, Kadyrov said: “We don't have these kinds of people here. We don't have any gays. If there are gays, take them to Canada. Take them far away from us. To purify our blood, if there are any here, take them... They are devils. They are for sale. They are not people. God damn them for what they are accusing us of. They will have to answer to the Almighty for this.”

He blamed the US for the accusations, saying, “America is conducting an anti-Russian policy against the country's leadership. They know that I'm ready to give my life for Russia, and that I have a good army capable of attacking and defending. We'll say how things go for everyone.”

He said later in the interview, “America is not really strong enough for us to regard it as an enemy of Russia. We have a strong government and a nuclear state. Even if our government was completely destroyed our nuclear missiles would automatically be deployed. We will put the whole world on its knees and screw it from behind.”

Kadyrov has said human rights groups are “enemies of the people.” There was an arson attack on the offices of the last human rights organisation working in Chechnya.

The Chechnya100 campaign group, which is working outside of Russia, has said that the persecutions, detentions and torture continue.

As the leader of All Russia, Putin has the power to investigate and stop the pogroms of LGBT+ people in Chechnya.

Upskirting and the law

By Hayley Webster

On 15 June Conservative MP Sir Christopher Chope got up in the House of Commons to object to a private member's bill seeking to legislate against “upskirting”. This is the practice of taking photos up peoples' skirts.

The Voyeurism (Offences) Bill, the result of an online petition set up by Gina Martin, herself a victim of upskirting, seeks to amend the Sexual Offences Act 2003 to criminalise the practice where the purpose is to obtain sexual gratification or cause humiliation, distress or alarm.

The absence of a specific criminal offence of upskirting in England and Wales has been described as a “gap” in the law. While the offence can and has been prosecuted under other headings such as “voyeurism” or “outraging public decency”, such a categorisation provides neither certainty in the law, nor reflects the sexual nature of the act.

Further, “voyeurism” would apply only to the filming or photographing of actions which were

taking place in public, and “outraging public decency” would require someone to have witnessed the action. Upskirting was made illegal in Scotland in 2009.

Chope, who shouted ‘Object!’ when the title of the bill was read out, received a significant amount of criticism from both inside and outside his party, delaying the private members bill so that it will now be reheard on 6 July, prompting Theresa May to pledge to make it into a government bill and it go through parliament.

Chope cited “unintended consequences” as his reason for objecting to the bill, but he appears to have a general aversion to private member's bills altogether.

Indeed, videos of his objection show the session to have been very poorly attended, with around 20 MPs present. On the other hand many MPs would have reasonably assumed this to be an uncontroversial piece of legislation.

Since then, both his constituency and commons offices have seen protests, with underwear adorning the entrances!

New and bigger far right on the streets

By Will Sefton

The rapid rise of new far-right street movements in the UK, spearheaded by the Democratic Football Lads Alliance (DFLA), and coalescing around the #FreeTommy movement, is a serious concern for the left and labour movement.

Alongside smaller more hard-line groups such as For Britain and the UK branch of the European far right youth movement, Generation Identity, the nationalist and populist far right are having a resurgence.

The DFLA was formed in the wake of the Manchester and London Bridge terror attacks and has brought together elements of the far-right with established football firms and hooligans.

Tommy Robinson — former BNP member, EDL and Pegida UK founder, and now far-right “journalist” with close links to Anne Marie Waters of For Britain — has become a figurehead for the wider movement since he was locked up for contempt of court.

Robinson was jailed after he claimed to be reporting the truth about sexual abuse by “Muslim grooming gangs”. Showing little concern for the survivors of sexual abuse, his report defied reporting restrictions made by the court and could have made the trial collapse.

Robinson’s aim was to stir up anti-Muslim racism and to create a storm around his “free speech” being curtailed. The Facebook live



Up to 15,000 turned out to protest against the jailing of Robinson on 8 June

stream that got Robinson arrested for was seen by more than 250,000 people. Those who rallied to Robinson’s defence in a big demonstration (maybe 10-15,000 people) in Whitehall on 8 June said they were protesting against an establishment gagging order.

The 8 June mobilisation was bigger than any managed by the National Front in the 1970s (their biggest turnout was around 1500), or the BNP at its peak.

This was no spontaneous mobilisation. One of the main driving forces behind this and a similar 5,000-strong mobilisation in Whitehall on 6 May is the DFLA. The DFLA was not a public backer of the June demonstration, which was initially called by a supporter of Generation Identity and promoted by ex-UKIP advisor, now of Breitbart London, Raheem Kassam. But

the DFLA supporters are enthusiastic participants in the movement.

UKIP leader Gerard Batten spoke at the 8 June rally. He was joined by Anne Marie Waters from For Britain, herself a former UKIP leadership candidate, who stood in the recent Lewisham East by-election (gaining just 1.5% of the votes and losing her deposit). Also on the platform, Geert Wilders from the Dutch Freedom Party and Filip Dewinter from the Belgian Vlaams Belang. A supportive message was sent from former Trump aide Steve Bannon.

LEFT

The left have not yet got to grips with this new political phenomenon.

Unlike the NF, the DFLA is not a tight and disciplined organisation, but at its core are a number of es-

tablished and ideological fascists and racists. To downplay the racist nature of the demonstration and the movement would be a serious mistake.

On the demonstration, alongside “siege heiling” and Nazi salutes was racist chanting. Numbers of people were looking for open confrontation with anti-fascists and the left.

This movement is undoubtedly linked to the outcome of the Brexit referendum. The Leave result and the assassination of the MP Jo Cox has emboldened the far-right. The political mood, with a government that is under pressure to deliver a hard Brexit and end freedom of movement, helps the far-right.

A well organised street movement will feed off the prevalent toxic nationalism and seek to pressure the government from the right.

It is incumbent on the left and labour movement to resist this movement both physically on the streets and also to challenge its political basis. Unfortunately the mobilisation by anti-fascist and anti-racist groups for the Whitehall demonstrations was too weak. SWP-dominated Stand up to Racism and Unite Against Fascism are the most significant forces on the ground, but have been unable to mobilise the broad support they had for anti-EDL mobilisations. Despite lip service to mobilisation, the turnout from unions to both demonstrations was very poor. It does not have to be this way.

A local mobilisation in Lewisham against a hustings at which Anne

Marie Waters was speaking (organised by the left group People Before Profit) was more of a success. The meeting hall was blocked by protestors and the meeting was disrupted. This demonstration and a rally against For Britain brought together anti-racist campaigners (in SUTR) but also Labour Party and trade union activists and people from Lewisham Muslim communities. Although these actions could have had a more consistently labour movement focus, they were a good beginning. Similar action should be replicated and scaled up.

The Labour Party has over 500,000 members and the unions have over six million members. The failure to turn these numbers out to oppose the far-right must be turned around and urgently.

For too long the labour movement has outsourced its anti-fascist work to other groups such as SUTR or Hope not Hate, paying an affiliation fee and circulate calls for mobilisations made by those groups. Now is the time to for the Labour Party and trade unions to call actions in its own name.

We need to educate trade unionists and Labour activists about the politics of the far-right. We need to organise local stalls and mobilise. Our models are Cable Street in 1936, Lewisham in 1977, and Southall in 1979.

Only mass action against the far right can stop them.

• Unity protest against far right 14 July, central London. bit.ly/14-jul-unity

Rome votes to rename street for a fascist

By Hugh Edwards

There could be no clearer indication of what the coming to power of Salvini/Di Maio has unleashed in Italy than recent events in Rome’s city council.

A motion from the ultra-right “Brothers of Italy” party, passed by a slim majority, committed the council to dedicate one of the city’s thoroughfares to Giorgio Almirante, the principal private secretary of Mussolini’s Minister of Popular Culture, and editor of an extreme voice of racist hatred, the *Defence of Race*.

The vote was supported by members of the Five-Star movement and thus underlines the deepening wave of ideological and political poison gripping the Italian people and how the racist campaign of Salvini threatens to engulf its Five Star coalition partner.

In recent municipal elections the party of Di Maio lost heavily, especially in its base in the south.

Emboldened, Salvini has now called for a new census of Roma and for all non-Italian Roma to be expelled from the country, a move even more reminiscent of Italy’s fascist past.

Italy’s new politics has brought out contradictions and divisions among Europe’s leading powers.

The critical but opportunistic response of Macron to Salvini’s “adventurist” action of banning NGO rescue ships from Italian ports was contemptuously dismissed by the Italian leader, who was able to point out Macron’s hypocrisy on migration. (The French government daily metes out brutal racist violence against migrants on the Italian/French border.)

Salvini’s spirited “nationalistic” defence of his actions had the immediate effect of uniting behind him sections of the Italian bourgeoisie who opposed his party.

No doubt Macron’s words reflect European leaders’ growing fears that Salvini will speed up the disintegration of European unity. In the background, Marine Le Pen pressures Macron, Steve Bannon predicts the arrival of an apocalypse for “Europe’s elite”, and the European elections are approaching.

Meanwhile Salvini — for whom Cromwell’s observation “no one travels further than he who does not know where he is going”, may be apt — is forging a national and European voice of the extreme

racist right. (He is now being courted now by Forza Italia). This should be a warning to the European left everywhere.

In a recent article in the *Observer* Kenan Malik highlighted the collective decisions of the European states over three decades to mount, strengthen and violently maintain a racist fortress against immigrants.

Their policy has, said Malik, “consisted of a three-pronged strategy of criminalising migrants, militarising border controls and externalising controls by paying non-EU states, on the other side of the Mediterranean huge amounts of money to act as Europe’s immigration police; in effect re-locating Europe’s borders for the proposed immigration policy, beyond Europe... so when the far right identitarian populist movements harass Médicins Sans Frontières and other NGO rescue crafts, or when they attack migrants, we ought to remember that they are not the first to do so. They are following European officialdom.”

Malik makes clear that African immigration throughout these decades has been integrally bound up with not just the systemic demand for immigrant labour in Eu-

rope, but also with the policies of global capitalist penetration in Africa involving deals and contracts with murderous elites in countries like Niger, Mali, Senegal, and Ethiopia.

Desperate efforts of people fleeing from such places for the “refuge” of Europe illustrates the horror they have endured under this latest form of neo-colonialism.

The racism of capitalist Europe is a structural constituent of the social political reality. As too is the resistance and self-organisation of the immigrant populations and especially among migrant workers.

BASE UNIONS

Relevant in Italy is the emergence of the base unions among the most exploited of the country’s “precariat” — in the logistics enterprises in the gig economy, in agriculture and in the face of systematic discrimination and increasing racist institutional repression.

It is a reality reflected in the speech of Paolo Saumahoro, speaking at the funeral of his workmate, a young Malian trade union activist, Soumayly Sacko. Sacko was murdered by a racist thug as he

helped two fellow workers to find scrap metal with which to build a home, among the wreckage of broken down factories near where they worked for 20 Euros for a 12-hour day.

Saumahoro made an angry militant attack on the Italian trade union movement and the country’s so called left: “The left doesn’t exist. It needs to be born from places like this and from the conflicts and social contradictions here, bringing together and uniting workers together in the fight for our common needs. We need to start from the rural areas, places dispersed and forgotten. If the left is not here it’s nowhere”.

That message goes to the heart of the matter for the left when we consider how we fight racism across the whole of Europe.

First and foremost the banner we fly must be one of internationalism, the political and practical foundation of a working-class led revolutionary course.

All our actions and struggles must have in mind the need to resist, challenge and ultimately overthrow the global order of capitalism, if humanity is to survive what lies ahead of us.

Why Greer is wrong about sex and rape

By Caroline Jeffries

Germaine Greer has once again made the headlines.

This time it was for calling for the punishment for rape to be reduced. Speaking at the Hay Literary Festival she argued that rape trials rarely end in convictions, so the courts should simply believe the victim and lower the penalty to alternatives like community service or for rapists to have an “r” tattooed on their body.

There is a general consensus amongst large parts of society that the state’s handling of rape cases — the big majority brought by women — is extremely flawed. However, Greer’s proposal shows a serious misunderstanding of the nature of rape and where the legal system goes wrong.

Large numbers of women don’t report rape due to fear or lack of faith in the system, which Greer rightfully highlights. However Greer is wrong about what most survivors want. They aren’t just looking for their attacker to have to do community service.

There surely are changes in the criminal justice system that would help survivors. However, arbitrarily raising the conviction rate for rape doesn’t address many of the material and indirect concerns many survivors face.

Most of our focus should go beyond the courts — on funding for social services and housing that help survivors, on women’s refuges, counselling services, rape crisis centres, and so on. Services like these will help survivors leave abusive relationships (where rape may be a regular occurrence) and recover from a traumatic experiences.

Socialists and feminists should also be thinking about ways to prevent violent attacks. For instance, comprehensive sex education classes that start at an early age where children learn about healthy and unhealthy relationships and consent. There are schemes already in place such as active bystander workshops, and these should be held in places beyond posh universities.

Perhaps the most concerning comments from Greer was her broad grouping of “bad sex” with rape. She said, “Instead of thinking of rape as a spectacularly violent crime, and some rapes are, think about it as non consensual ... that is bad sex. Sex where there is no communication, no tenderness, no mention of love”.

This statement is troubling for a number of reasons.

Firstly, there is something oddly old-fashioned and moralistic about calling for people to only have sex that has “tenderness” and “mentions of love”. It harkens back to the reactionary idea that you should only have sex



Greer: wrong again

with someone you love or “if it means something”. Ideally every sexual experience anyone ever has would be great, but something like losing your virginity or an unfulfilling internet hook-up is not the same as rape.

Yes it’s true that patriarchal social power dynamics mean that in heterosexual relationships sex is male-centred, causing many women to feel unfulfilled in their sex lives. However, sex that is consensual and not coerced, but simply unsatisfying, is also not rape. We can believe that social power structures affect what happens in the bedroom without calling unsatisfying sex rape.

By grouping bad sex and rape together, Greer trivialises the experience of rape and surviving rape. Perhaps she thinks her comments are empowering when she says that “we haven’t been destroyed, we’ve been bloody annoyed is what we’ve been”. But this just isn’t true! Rape and sexual assault is a traumatic event. Even if a survivor doesn’t suffer from PTSD, the event could radically change how they view relationships, themselves and their sexuality.

Greer’s argument could in fact be damaging to the fight against sexual violence. Other feminists have long fought to get the difference between what constitutes bad sex and rape recognised. Critics of the movement on campuses to confront date rape and intoxicated consent have accused victims of “just having a bad night”.

These criticisms are wrong and prejudiced, and Greer’s comments could potentially fuel more of these sentiments.

EEA poor substitute

I was intrigued by the line in the editorial in *Solidarity* 472, headlined “Build the left against Brexit”.

It states *Solidarity* supports the PLP voting for amendments to the EU Withdrawal Bill that would keep the UK in the EEA. Whilst this is an improvement on the prospect of a hard Brexit, I think it is the wrong approach to the question.

The AWL has been raising the slogan of “Stop Brexit” and rightly so. Membership of the EEA is a poor substitute for full membership of the EU. EEA members must make budget contributions and accept regulations without having any say in decision making.

Further, if we accept Labour is only arguing for EEA membership, we lose the opportunity for debate and give credence to the Labour right. The article correctly states their primary concern is for businesses to continue trading freely. Therefore whilst a Government defeat in Parliament is welcome, it will do nothing to aid our cause of building the left against Brexit.

Secondly, I think there is a typo in the phrase “A minority of Labour voters opposed Brexit”. From the context of the paragraph, I think this should read “A minority of Labour voters supported Brexit”. There were various arguments for a leave vote, from the Red Tories of Labour Leave to sections of the hard left peddling the myth of Lexit. In contrast, polling just after the referendum showed two thirds of Labour supporters voted “Remain”. Today, opposition to Brexit is estimated at 80% among Labour members.

These statistics give further weight to having a proper debate on Brexit at this year’s Labour Party Conference.

Alex Stuart, Basingstoke

No real unity without national rights

LETTERS

Any internationalist will undoubtedly share Andrew Northall’s desire (*Solidarity* 468, 2 May 2018) for federation and unity between the Israeli Jews and Palestinian Arabs, the two national peoples currently inhabiting historic Palestine.

But the only immediate answer to the day-to-day source of national oppression in the region, Israel’s colonial subjugation of the Palestinians, is an independent Palestinian state alongside Israel.

As a long-range aspiration, a secular, democratic, binational federation of Palestine, within a secular, democratic, multinational federation of the Middle East, is a noble one. But how to persuade the Palestinians, whose entire existence as a national people has been conditioned by the strangulation of their right to self-determination at the hands of a colonial oppressor, to give up their claim to statehood?

And how to persuade the Israeli Jews, whose existence as a national people is substantially the product of experiences of persecution and attempted genocide, and whose state was subject to an attempted war of conquest the moment it was born, to give up theirs?

Only a framework based on the mutual recognition of equal rights, including national rights, including the right to form an independent state, can lay the basis for future voluntary federation and unity.

Andrew writes: “What are the prospects of engaging with the majority Israeli working class, detaching them from the imperialist caste and class ruling them, and working with Palestinians and other Arab people to transform the current state into a genuinely democratic state for the region in which all peoples have guaranteed, individual, collective and national rights [...] as happened for

example in South Africa?”

On the basis of such radically misplaced analogies, the prospects are very slim indeed. What resulted in South Africa was not a state “in which all peoples have guaranteed [...] national rights”: the white South Africans were not a national people but an ethno-cultural caste, whose state economy relied on the exploitation of the labour of the black majority. The political revolution against apartheid rightly smashed that state, replacing it with a democratic one.

CASTE?

The Israeli Jews are not a “caste”, but a fully class-differentiated national people according to any Marxist, or even basic sociological, definition of that term.

The black struggle against apartheid had many heroic white allies, but it was not forged on the basis of working-class unity between blacks and whites; while poor whites existed in apartheid South Africa, they were economically marginal. It was the organisation and self-assertion of black labour that toppled apartheid.

By contrast, in Israel/Palestine, as Andrew himself acknowledges, unity between the two working classes will be vital for any genuine progressive change in the region. How is that unity to be built if it first requires the working classes of both nations to accept that they cannot express their self-determination at the level of a state? If Andrew wants a settlement “in which all peoples have guaranteed [...] national rights”, he must accept that this is likely to involve those national rights being expressed in the form of separate states.

Is a two-states settlement immediately likely, on the current balance of forces? Clearly not. But no genuinely democratic settlement of any kind is “likely” to emerge unless that balance of forces shifts.

To shift it requires a social movement

within both Israel and the occupied territories that can unite Jewish and Arab workers around a common programme.

To imagine that this common programme could involve the demand that both groups immediately develop post-national consciousness is fancifully utopian and entirely without historical precedent. I would be delighted to be proved wrong, but this development seems distinctly less likely than the possibility that Israel might be forced, through a combination of internal social pressure and external diplomatic and economic pressure (such as arms embargos), to concede a viable Palestinian state.

From a distance, a politically-marginal revolutionary socialist left cannot do much more than attempt to understand the situation and proceed from basic principles: in this case, an opposition to national oppression and support for the right of national groups to self-determination.

In practical terms, our efforts are best directed towards making links and building solidarity with forces like the Workers’ Advice Centre, a radical trade-union centre organising both Jewish and Arab workers; and the Standing Together movement, a cross-party social movement of radicals, involving both Jews and Arabs, which organises to fight against the occupation and for social justice.

The immediate political programme of both these forces is for a two-states settlement. If, as they grow, the consciousness and desire for some kind of binational or post-national solution emerges, to the extent that this becomes a viable possibility, that will be a positive development.

But it is a development that will be far less likely to occur if the activists animating those movements take Andrew’s advice and insist in advance only on unitary or post-national settlements.

Ira Berkovic, Islington

For a Workers' Europe

Why campaign to stop Brexit?

To uphold the rights of the three million EU migrants currently in Britain, our workmates, our neighbours, our friends, our fellow trade-unionists. To defend their right to reunite their families. To sustain the right of others across Europe to come to work and live in Britain, and the right of British-born people to go to work and live in Europe.

We want more open borders, less fences and barbed-wire and barriers between countries. The technologies and productive capacities of today indict the division of continents into walled-off nation-states.

But Britain can't afford more migrants?

On the contrary: public services can't afford a reduction in the number of migrant workers. The labour movement, in which migrant workers have played a vitalising part for over 180 years now, can't afford a reduction.

About 200,000 people from the 27 EU countries work in health and care, 5% of the total workforce. About 10% of doctors in NHS England are from the EU27.

Even the Tory government has recently had to ease its restrictions on migrant workers for the NHS.

Researchers at University College London have found that migrants from the ten "new" EU member states in Eastern Europe countries pay about 12% more (£5 billion) in taxes than they get in benefits and services. Migrants from other EU states pay in 64% more than they get out (£25 billion), and those from outside the EU pay 3% more than they get (another £5 billion).

In London, for example, inward migration — from the EU and from other parts of Britain too — has put housing into short supply. The answer to that is to tax the rich to build more social housing and expand other public services.

But migrant workers pull down pay rates?

Researchers at LSE and elsewhere conclude that increased immigration has tended more to raise pay rates. Countries with high immigration are generally more dynamic, as well as culturally richer, than those with low migration.

At most there may be some small downward pressure in the lowest wage bands. The answer there is stronger trade unions and better enforcement of minimum wage laws.

That's all very well, but the EU isn't pro-migrant

The EU isn't pro-migrant, though some major EU states, such as Germany and Sweden, have a better record than Britain.

In 2017, Germany gave asylum to 524,000 refugees, France 111,000, and Italy 78,000. The UK admitted only 28,000, just marginally more than tiny Belgium.

We will work with the left across Europe to open up its borders. Putting up new barriers within Europe won't help that.

Like it or not, the 2016 referendum decided, and we must go with that

A snap vote on vague alternatives, with the Tory government then shaping the actual outcome, is poor democracy.

Democracy means the continuous formation, disputation, revision, and re-formation of a collective majority opinion. Minorities must have their say, and have channels of opportunity to change or reverse the majority

opinion.

The "Leave" option in 2016 was presented as freeing cash for the NHS. Now we know that Brexit prospects are already damaging the NHS.

It was presented as a matter of quickly negotiating slick trade deals with countries outside the EU. Now we know that's not happening. The government's own Office for Budgetary Responsibility forecasts that Brexit will bring a shortfall of £15bn a year to the UK's public finances. Other government studies show that Brexit will reduce economic growth (and reduce it more in the areas that voted Leave).

The vote excluded 16-17 year olds, who have most at stake, and EU citizens living here, although they have the right to vote in local elections.

Parliament and the electorate have every right to impose as much control as they can on the Tory ministers now taking the 2016 referendum as a mandate for their sort of Brexit.

What's all this about the Irish border?

All the benign hopes of the Good Friday Agreement of 1998 rested on the assumption, unquestioned then, that Britain and the 26 Counties would remain linked in an ever-more-integrated EU. The larger frame of European integration would smooth ancient conflicts.

That benign scenario has disappointed over the last twenty years. There are still over a hundred "peace walls" separating communities in Northern Ireland, though a few have been taken down in recent years. But disruption caused by Brexit could derail even the most tentative progress.

Whatever the Tories say about smart technological fixes, re-erecting barriers between Britain and the EU must mean either barriers in the Irish Sea, or barriers between Northern Ireland and the South.

If you campaign in the Labour Party to stop Brexit, you're just backing the Labour right wing

Some Labour right-wingers, by no means all, support Britain staying in the Single Market. Their motives are smoother supply chains for industry in Britain, but their conclusion is right.

On whether Labour Party conference 2018 should be able to discuss and vote on Brexit policy, for example, we are willing to ally with those Labour right-wingers. As in the heyday of Stalinism we would ally with anti-Stalinist Labour right-wingers against the pro-Stalinist left on workers' rights in the Stalinist states.

The Labour-right Single Marketers, however, mostly do not support free movement. They claim that they can find tricks and dodges within Single Market rules to limit free movement. Our priorities are very different.

The Single Market enforces free-market rules and would stop a Labour government doing socialist measures

The Single Market is free-marketist in large part because of British pushing and pressure. Its rules reflect the process over recent decades of European governments adopting what they used to shun as the "Anglo-Saxon" policies pioneered by Thatcher and Reagan.

But the EU is a loose confederation, not a state. Reprisals for breaching its rules would be the least of worries for a workers' government in Britain which really challenged capitalist power. That workers' government could expect — and would need — much more in the way of cooperation with European labour movements inspired by its example.

France, Germany, and other states have flouted EU rules about budget deficits constantly. Hungary and others have flouted EU rules about admitting refugees: that shows (in a bad way) that even small EU member

states are not terrorised by EU rules.

Immediately, nothing in Labour's 2017 manifesto would be blocked by Single Market rules. Going beyond the 2017 manifesto, restoring union rights to solidarity action, to quick responses, to picketing, would be against no EU rule. In fact, France has wider, better union rights than Britain had before Thatcher.

Restoring NHS funding would be against no EU rule. Ditto restoring local government autonomy and funding, and thus social care and libraries. Ditto restoring state-funded schools to local authority control. Ditto abolishing SATS, GCSEs and school "league tables". Ditto restoring welfare benefits. Ditto nationalising the banks (which, after all, the Labour government did in 2008, only in a conservative and temporary way).

What's wrong with the official Labour Party policy of wanting to negotiate a single market with the EU, not the Single Market?

We want to change EU rules, to democratise the EU, and win social levelling-up across Europe. The way to do that is to work with the left and labour movements across Europe.

The Single Market is, at its core, a set of harmonised regulations for products, labelling, safety and so on across Europe. The proposal to whistle up an instant different "single market" through Brexit diplomacy is as if in 1752, when Britain changed its calendar to fit with Europe, and there were riots in protest, someone should say: We are for a single calendar to be negotiated with Europe, but not The Single Calendar.

Fundamentally, the EU is capitalist, and we must break with capitalism

The Tory Brexit taking shape, and any likely Brexit soon, means a Britain just as capitalist as now, but meaner, more illiberal, more walled-off. That is regression. Socialists

build on the progressive achievements (and semi-achievements, and quarter-achievements) of capitalism, rather than trying to reach the future by diving back into an idealised past.

The way beyond capitalism is through united left-wing and working-class efforts reaching across borders, uniting workers continent-wide and worldwide.

Official and academic reports on:

- Impact of Brexit on NHS: bit.ly/brexit-nhs
- Impact of migration on public budgets: bit.ly/brexit-taxes
- Impact of migration on wages: bit.ly/brexit-wages
- Impact of Brexit on output: bit.ly/brexit-gdp



Workers' Liberty will hold its annual Ideas for Freedom event on 21-24 June. Expect plenty of arguments against vulture capitalism. We will report in the next issue of *Solidarity*, which will be out on 4 July.

Failures of left rule boosted far right

CHALLENGES OF A LABOUR GOVERNMENT

By Michael Elms

In 1981, a radical left government took power in France. Heading up a coalition of the Socialist and Communist Parties, the new President, Francois Mitterrand, brought the left in from the cold and promised to "Change Life, Here and Now".

While the workers cheered, many capitalists quailed: the Franc crashed at the news.

The election seemed to herald social changes in France and beyond, and for some, the first steps towards establishing socialism in the West.

But by the 1990s, almost everything built in the first years of the Mitterrand government had disappeared. The right governed (and from 1986 to 1988, had governed with Mitterrand), and the government's nationalisations were almost all reversed (in some cases by Mitterrand).

And far from effecting a long-term shift in French politics to the left, one of the long-term consequences of the 1981 government paradoxically, was the transformation of the far-right Front National into a major player in French politics.

In 1968, a vast workers' movement revolted against the corrupt and stifling conservatism of Gaullist French society. The establishment around De Gaulle rode the crisis out by calling an election and making concessions on wages. But for the following 13 years, Gaullism tottered, discredited; while the revolutionary left, the Communist Party, and the previously-moribund Socialist Party (PS) grew.

GROWTH

The PS in particular grew rapidly: by 1981 it was polling higher than the PCF which had dwarfed it in 1968 (and still did, in membership); and the more PS-aligned union federation CFDT grew relative to the Communist-led (and larger) CGT.

Mitterrand was able to leverage this growth to batter the PCF into uniting with him around a "common programme" in 1972.

Mitterrand had declared himself in favour of revolution. But underneath he was a machine politician: conventional, and opportunist. He had served in Guy Mollet's 1956 government. For Mollet, he had done the job of repressing the movement for Algerian independence: overseeing 45 executions; supporting the escalation of the war; and being in daily telephone contact with the French torturers in Algiers.

In 1981, the new government set about carrying out its programme. One of its first acts was to abolish the death penalty. They went on to nationalise almost the whole financial sector, plus 12 big industrial firms. They increased the minimum wage (SMIC) by over 10%, and hired an additional 200,000

civil servants. The retirement age was lowered to 60. In 1982, the government started work on reducing the working week from 40 to 35 hours, with an initial reduction to 39. When Mitterrand's government proposed sweetening the deal for employers by allowing them to impose more flexible working patterns on their workers in return for paying for a reduction in working time, workers themselves intervened in the debate, with powerful strikes in engineering, car plants and supermarkets. The government headed off the strike wave by backing down on flexible work contracts, but would return to the theme later.

POPULAR FRONT

Under Allende's socialist government in Chile, a militant movement for workers' control of industry had driven the government on to undertake a whole series of nationalisations "in law" after the workers had taken them over, or nearly taken them over, "in fact." Blum's Popular Front government of 1936 found itself blown forward by the winds of a vast strike movement.

But here the dynamic was different. Mitterrand's government was using the levers of state to carry out a programme of reforms, but jealously guarded its independence from the workers' movement in the streets below.

A mixture of capital flight and increased workers' spending power combined with international financial crisis, a rising dollar and contraction in the German economy, put inflationary pressures on the Franc.

Some of the ministers on Mitterrand's left proposed continuing the reforms. They advocated strict capital controls to curb capital flight. But instead the government opted for a "pause" in the reforms – a pause which would become permanent. This became known as the "austerity turn". In June 1982, the government declared a four-month wage freeze. As the austerity measures mounted, with huge tax increases on workers and consumers, the CGT and the CFDT pronounced their support for the "pause". When PCF Health minister Jack Ralite imposed hospital charges for patients in 1983, the PCF defended his move ("when you're at home, you pay for your own meals, don't you?").

In 1983, 1,900 jobs were cut at the Peugeot plant in Poissy. Workers occupied the plant in response: the CRS riot police were sent in to clear them out.

In March 1984, the government approved plans to cut 21,000 steel jobs. In Longwy, 150,000 demonstrated, betrayed by the left parties that had helped them in their strikes only six years before. Mitterrand was burned in effigy. The PCF was reduced to saying, lamely, "We are in the government and we are for the workers." They would finally slink out of government in mid-1984.

Mitterrand's project unravelled. Having accepted the need to "fight inflation" in order to win back capitalists' confidence and their investments, the government found itself forced to pursue austerity measures in earnest: there was no halfway house between winning capitalists back round, or seizing their money. The government let

firms fail, or sack their way to profitability.

The results at the next elections were predictable: the left vote started to fall. Whereas the fascist Le Pen had polled 0.72% in 1974, in 1984 he matched the PCF's 11% vote.

The rise of the Front National wasn't accidental. It was not only the result of the betrayals of the left in power. It was also fed by a nationalism embraced opportunistically by the left. When workers struck at a Renault plant in 1983, Mauroy made a speech complaining about "immigrants being agitated by groups... that have no connection with French social reality". On Christmas Eve 1980, the Communist Mayor of Vitry, Paul Mercieca, thought he would boost his polls by running a bulldozer into a hostel full of Malian migrant workers, which he did. The act was defended by the British Stalinist newspaper the *Morning Star* as a blow struck against "a dumping operation". Socialist minister Gaston Defferre thundered: "Illegal immigrants must know that they can be deported!"

The reformist left betrayed workers in the hopes of winning over capitalists, of using technocratic means to reconcile the two classes and get their working-class supporters "back in their box".

They tried to shore themselves up, using racist demagoguery as a way of pandering to base prejudice instead of organising, educating and elevating a movement to defend their project. The result was the rise of a serious fascist party in France. There is an urgent lesson here for the Corbyn movement.

The four Bastanis and the EU

By Martin Thomas

The commentator Aaron Bastani, who has gained some profile on the Labour left from his Novara Media platform, will debate us on Brexit at our summer school, Ideas for Freedom, on 23-24 June.

In late May he responded to an article in the *Observer* by political editor Toby Helm, reporting pressure from Labour members for a real debate on Brexit at Labour conference 2018, by accusing Helm (a routine journalist who used to work for the *Daily Telegraph*) of publishing an "AWL press release".

We challenged Bastani to debate Brexit.

He agreed to debate Brexit with us two years ago, in a fringe meeting at the NUT teachers' union conference, shortly before the referendum. He pulled out at the last minute, saying that he had changed his mind and was no longer pro-Brexit.

He wrote about in on the Open Democracy website (9 June 2016). He had previously been for Brexit, he said, because of the bad effects of the EU's trade policy on poorer countries.

"Britain outside the EU would have a trade policy just as objectionable as the EU does at present", he conceded. But inside the

EU, citing the right-wing direction of major EU governments in recent years, he saw no openings for democratisation.

A separated Britain could be different. It could do a "Left Exit", with "industrial policy" and "tariffs". That wasn't a nationalist choice, because Lexited Britain could also introduce a more liberal policy on immigration from outside the EU.

And, claimed Bastani, it could "aim at reforming some of the world's most important, and screwed up, institutions: the IMF, WTO, and the UN Security Council".

Workers of Europe, Unite? Unrealistic! British bourgeois diplomats, change the world? Just the answer!

It was no sobering-up from that scenario that made him flip. No, it was that "the unexpected event of high office [for Jeremy Corbyn, John McDonnell, etc.], and potentially forming a future government, has made a radical left exit campaign impossible this time round".

The only real Brexit campaign was a right-wing one. Whatever Bastani's criticisms of the EU, "the current context – of euroscepticism now transitioning to outright xenophobia – is simply too great an overhead". So he would vote remain.

The argument seems to be that if Jeremy Corbyn had remained an isolated Labour

back-bencher, then he could have run a good "Left Exit" campaign. But since Corbyn was in a position where he might gain government, he had to go with "Remain". "Left Exit" was a good idea, as long as it had no possibility of being implemented?

After the referendum result, Bastani said: "What the left has to focus on now is remaining in the EEA". The EEA is the European Economic Area, including Norway, Iceland, Liechtenstein, and Croatia, a sort of outer-tier three-quarters membership of the EU.

As Bastani noted, Britain in the EEA would "guarantee freedom of movement for Brits but also for the current European nationals who are residents of and working in the UK". It would also tie Britain to EU trade policy and deprive a left government in Britain of a voice in EU affairs, but he didn't mention that.

He wanted Corbyn, the Greens, the SNP and the Liberal Democrats to "build a coalition around staying in the EEA".

Since then, as his angry response to Helm's report of pressure inside Labour indicates, Bastani's line has been pretty much that the Labour left should back Corbyn's choices come what may (even though Corbyn currently rejects the EEA).

Building the ‘Left Against Brexit’

Michael Chessum, organiser of Another Europe is Possible and its “Left Against Brexit” speaker tour spoke to *Solidarity*.

The Left Against Brexit is an initiative that seeks to take back what should be the common-sense left wing position on Brexit, and stand out from the more centrist establishment anti-Brexit campaigns.

David Miliband may believe speaking out with Nicky Morgan and Nick Clegg from a rice factory will do the trick. We don’t.

The left has slipped back on its ideas around the EU since the referendum. A lot of the left and not just in the Labour Party, is of the view that it is better to keep your head down and hope for a Labour government to sort it out. I think that is totally misplaced for a number of reasons.

We have 18 locations lined up for the Left Against Brexit speaker tour. We would like to do more. The first are 4 July in Manchester and 11 July in London. We are on course to sell out both venues.

Organisers who were previously involved in AEIP across the UK are excited about it and we are finally getting back to some of what we did during the campaign.

Personally I want there to be a national demonstration against the Brexit bill. That would be broader than just calling for a “People’s Vote”. It should be based around the idea of “Block the bill”. That way it would get people who don’t support the “People’s Vote” coming onboard.

I hope we can bring organisations including the NUS onboard in backing that.

Brexit is not just a policy. It is a project. That project comes with a narrative as to who is to blame for the crisis. It blames migrants for a crisis caused by the political and economic elite.

That narrative is kryptonite to the left and will damage us very severely in the long run, if we concede to any of it.

We’re also dealing here with a process that will wreck the economy. Socialists are rightly sceptical about “doing what is good for the economy”; but here we are in going to be in a position of major austerity, and the only way for Corbyn to get out of that would be a hugely accelerated socialist programme. I would be in favour of this but I am sceptical about the Parliamentary Labour Party being willing.

Chuka Umunna and Chris Leslie are unlikely to walk through the division lobbies in favour of nationalisation and expropriation on the scale that will be needed with a major economic downturn?

The British people voted to leave the EU, and we do respect that. But the multiplicity of what Brexit meant to people means lots of different options were in effect voted for. There is now just one version of Brexit. We ask, does that version of Brexit have a majority?

Will people looking it straight in the eye say that is what they want? Or better than being in the EU?

People are allowed to change their minds.

Below the surface 80% of Labour members agree with us, and think there should be a



referendum on the terms of the deal. This tour is about banging a big drum that says “we are on the left and are opposed to Brexit” and getting people to put their heads above the parapet.

There is a lot of pressure to keep your head down and stay in line with the leadership. But the leadership have never brought their policy for Brexit to conference. Corbyn has not run on a programme of supporting Brexit during his leadership elections or in the 2017 General Election.

CONFERENCE

In fact Labour has a conference position from 2016 that says that there would be a final say on the Brexit deal whether that was via referendum or a general election and that Labour should vote against the deal unless it meets its six tests.

I want to see Conference very proudly restate that and win a majority round to vote against the deal in Parliament and to support a referendum on that deal.

The underlying politics of the issue are about campaigning in favour of free movement.

We combat the idea that social problems are caused by freedom of movement and assert the need to campaign for strong trade unions, abolishing the anti-union laws, a socialist government that creates an irreversible shift in the balance of power that gives people control over their own destiny.

Rhetorically now the Labour Party is the best it has ever been on immigration, but the actual policy is no different to if Ed Miliband was still in charge! We have a triangulation to the right on immigration which must be causing Corbyn, McDonnell and Abbott some problems in their own heads. I think are probably very torn about this.

It isn’t that hard for Labour to have a left wing immigration policy, defend and extend free movement, and improve people’s lives at the same time. The vast majority of Brexit-supporting Labour voters and indeed Brexit supporters in general do not rank freedom of movement or even immigration as their number one issue. They rank housing, public services, wages and jobs just as much as anti Brexit people. If you give people real solutions on those things then you win time and space to convince them on other things.

Extending freedom of movement will benefit the workers’ movement as a whole. If mi-

grant workers win more rights, the levelling up will benefit everyone. The more rights you take from migrants, the more precarious they become and the more difficult it is to organise. Labour should say that it will keep

free movement, improve social housing, keep wages above inflation, provide more funding in schools and increase public investment.

That is how Labour should deal with people’s “immigration concerns”.

THE LEFT AGAINST BREXIT

A NATIONWIDE TOUR THIS SUMMER



Lambeth Labour people campaign for Remain in 2016

Momentum should oppose Brexit

Momentum supporters have launched a petition to trigger an all member vote of members to oppose Tory Brexit. Details of the petition and how to sign are below.

#StopToryBrexit — A Final Say For The Many

We are proud members of Momentum and consistent supporters of Jeremy Corbyn’s leadership of the Labour Party and of the 2017 election manifesto. We deplore the persistent attacks of the right-wing of the Labour Party and their attempts to weaponise the issue of Brexit against our party leadership.

But we are equally opposed to the Tory Brexit now on offer. It is a disaster for working class people, public services, peace in Ireland, migrants, the environment, human

rights, jobs and our children’s futures — the complete opposite of everything a socialist government would do. The so-called soft Brexit being pushed by neo-liberal “centrists” is hardly better: it threatens to turn us into a vassal state of Europe, making us rule takers not rule makers.

We call for a vote of all Momentum members this summer to decide whether to oppose Tory Brexit, and whether to campaign for Labour to hold a vote at Annual Conference in September on giving the people the final say on the Brexit deal.

We are a democratic socialist movement, and under Momentum’s constitution we can trigger a vote of all members with signatures from around 4000 Momentum members — please add your name today, and spread the word!

• Sign the petition here bit.ly/2t1m2Sz

Robert Fine 1945-2018

The socialist writer and activist Robert Fine died on 9 June 2018, at the age of 72. We publish extracts from tributes from those who knew and worked with him. More tributes here: bit.ly/2lkKnEx

Martin Thomas

For almost four decades Robert Fine had been the best-known “public intellectual” of the broad current of thinking on the left in which Workers’ Liberty is the chief activist element.

Robert aligned himself with the radical left in the late 1960s, particularly, as I understand it, when he was a graduate student at Columbia University in New York in 1967-71, and active there in the movement against the Vietnam war.

Returning to Britain in 1973, he became a lecturer in sociology at Warwick University. He worked there until retirement, by which time he was a professor and head of department. He joined a forerunner organisation of Workers’ Liberty in the mid-late 1970s. In the 1990s Robert edged out of day-to-day political activity.

Uncharacteristically for a university professor, on his university web page he offered no distancing from his activist years. “I was active in Socialist Organiser, Workers’ Liberty, anti-apartheid and other radical and antiracist organisations”.

He was struck down with the affliction which has now killed him only days before he was going to speak at our July 2017 summer school, Ideas for Freedom.

As he found his feet in Trotskyist politics in the late 70s, Robert became a quiet but acute critical voice among us. He came into his own as, piecemeal over the 1980s, as we went through a “reevaluation of political values”.

Robert wrote a lot about South Africa, and contributed a lot to shaping our politics on the fight against apartheid. Warwick University had a special programme for students from South Africa, which he was heavily involved with.

The conventional Trotskyist critique of the Communist Party of South Africa, which then as now played a big role in the ANC, was that it relegated its “maximum” (nominally socialist) programme to an indefinite future stage after the realisation of its “minimum” (democratic) programme. Robert showed that from a working-class democratic point of view, the “maximum” (Stalinist, though nominally “socialist”) programme was a greater evil than the “minimum”.

The new young activists coming forward from the Corbyn surge can no longer hear Robert himself explain and dissect issues.

They can and should read his books, notably: *Democracy and the Rule of Law* (1984, new edition 2002); *Policing the Miners’ Strike* (1985); *Beyond Apartheid* (1990), and *Antisemitism and the Left* (2017).

Clive Bradley

I learned a great deal from Bob Fine when I worked with him on anti-apartheid issues in the mid-late eighties. In particular, his criticism of the popular view which saw the liberation movement just as a kind of “elemental” resistance to oppression — as if it was all just kids throwing stones — had a big impact on me.

In fact there was, in South Africa at that time, one of the richest and most sophisticated debates about strategy, including socialist strategy, anywhere in the world. Bob was an expert on all of that, and in particular

on the militant independent trade union movement which was playing such a vital role in the struggle. This rejection of stereotypical images of “resistance” stayed with me; his voice was constantly in my head, for example, during the “Arab Spring”.

Bob’s “take” on the anti-apartheid struggle meant he was often at loggerheads with the dominant liberation movement, the African National Congress — defending others, in South Africa, who were at loggerheads with them, too, a stance which took considerable moral courage. This, too, I hope, has stayed with me as an example to emulate.

Andrew Coates

Bob Fine did not just make important contributions to socialist writing and theory.

He was active in the Leamington Spa Anti-Racist Anti-Fascist Committee (LARAFC) in the late 1970s and early 1980s (1977-1981).

Bob and his partner Jenny were at the time associated with the International-Communist League (I-CL)/ Socialist Organiser. He strongly participated in the community activities of the group, which produced a regular newsletter of which between 500 to 1000 copies were sold around the town.

I shall never forget one LARAFC meeting when it was announced that Robert Relf [the leading local fascist] had been taken to the police station and roughed up. Some people began to snigger. An angry Jenny stood up and said that human rights were for everybody and that even fascists like Relf should not be mistreated. Bob led the room in agreement.

David Hirsh

Robert Fine’s book on left antisemitism, written with Philip Spencer, shows how what is constructed as “The Jewish Question” is always actually an antisemitism question; not “what do Jews do to make people hate them?” but “why are so many tempted to package all that is bad in with the Jews?” It is a defence of the Marxist and critical tradition against the “socialism of fools”.

It is a fierce critique both of the idea that the left is essentially antisemitic and also of the denial of the existence of a tradition of authentically left wing antisemitism. He excavates the left critique of antisemitism not out of academic interest but in order to understand it, to mobilise it and to keep it alive.

Before apartheid in South Africa was defeated, Robert wrote, with Dennis Davis, a critique of apartheid, a sociology of the anti-apartheid movement and also a critique of some of the more nationalist politics of the ANC. It was a specifically socialist take on the liberation movement, some of whose warnings are turning out to have been prescient.

And before that he wrote a classic, from which students are still taught Marx, *Democracy and the rule of law*. It is a critique of liberal theories and practices of law and of capitalist exploitation; but the critique is meticulous in maintaining consistent opposition to a contempt for liberty. Democracy is not a bourgeois fiction to be treated as an obstacle to liberation but a first draft of human liberty, to be improved.

Robert would have loved people who didn’t know his work to still start reading it now. He would have loved it more if his work remains influential in practical politics; both in the struggle against the existing structures of material injustice but simultaneously in vigilance against those who relentlessly fail to fear tearing everything down, as if there is nothing in the contemporary world worth



Robert Fine with Jean Lane (in the clearing in the middle of the photo, slightly right of centre, holding Workers’ Action newspapers) at the anti-fascist march in Lewisham, 13 August 1977.

anything, and as though liberty can be built from nothing, later, simply by an effort of the will.

This last insight illustrates his despair about Brexit and populism more generally. European Union, he was sure, should be nurtured, enhanced and improved, not smashed up in self-infantilising anger.

Serge Paul

At the end of 1958, I found my first term at school oppressive, frightening and unstimulating. Then, a new chap joined our class, quiet at first but, one day, he said or did something that annoyed our form master, “Jack” Train, who threw a Greek Primer at this new arrival, Robert Fine. Slowly, Bob picked up the book and, to all our amazement, hurled it straight back to Jack who just did not know what to do about it. Suddenly, I had a hero who did not give in to others and he became my great friend and inspiration for 60 years and, as luck would have it, lived only 200 yards from me in Primrose Hill.

Jean Lane

I first met Bob in the late 1970s. He and other anti-apartheid activists helped me set up the anti-apartheid group in Lanchester Polytechnic. We held regular demonstrations outside Barclays Bank. I later moved into his house as a lodger and would quite often, when getting up for my early shift on the post, find a South African exile sleeping on the living room floor.

The house was full of discussion, debate, analysis of everything under the sun and lots and lots of laughter. Bob drove me crazy and surprised me in equal measure because he very rarely got angry whatever the topic, he would just try to reason why someone thought or did what they did. It took the wind out of your sails when you got all het up. I had never really met people like this before.

I marched with Bob in Lewisham and in Brick Lane against the fascists, and picketed Grunwicks with him too. He was that rare thing that you don’t see much of nowadays, a very active academic. Reason in revolt. We lost touch over more recent years, but you didn’t need to be seeing him all the time to know his worth. What a loss.

Sean Matgamna

An awful lot of licensed intellectuals pass through the Marxist movement, mere visitors, for a short or a longer stay. It is a movement of ideas and theories as well as of class struggle, and ideas are their trade. They can easily juggle with ideas and systems, drop them and pick others up.

Bob Fine was no mere visitor. He joined the predecessor of AWL some 42 years ago. He

took sides in the class struggle, and stayed.

He chose his academic work to help fight the class struggle in the battle of ideas. He was no mere academic, but a militant committed to the working-class movement for as long as it takes, for as long a time as he had left.

Mick O’Sullivan

I first met Bob when he joined Socialist Organiser. Strangely, given our rather different personalities we became friends. When I became his PhD student he was generous with time, hospitality and most importantly his ideas. He was always stimulating to talk to and I always valued discussions with him.

Alas, we lost touch with each other for many years, until quite by chance we met again some 18 months ago,

Bob wrote many important books and while his work on antisemitism will be part of the foundation of the body of work arming us all against left antisemitism. For me his most important contribution was *Democracy and the Rule of Law*, if for no other reason than it provides one of the best expositions of Marxism that one can find.

Lawrence Welch

We met in the late 70s and strongly connected over our opposition to Apartheid which led us to write a pamphlet together in 1982 for the Socialist Forum for Southern African Solidarity. The title, *A Question of Solidarity*, captures well our shared interests in exploring the challenge of bringing about change in a turbulent world.

Robert was a lively, creative and thoughtful man with a powerful intellectual ability to enter into exploring the difficult issues of democracy and dialogue.

I would like to finish with a quote from Robert’s book *Being Stalked* which I have just started reading and which I felt captured well his awareness of the complexities of being human:

“I am a socialist and should like to think that my socialism — though less active than it used to be, less wedded to any ‘ism’, even that of the social, and less sure that those who are injured in life will not simply injure back — is still able to recognise that social relations are not fixed and that the debilitating consequences of class inequality are not an inescapable part of the human condition.

“The fact that deprivation and a legitimate sense of injustice may sometimes lead to madness and malice rather than to enlightenment and emancipation, and the fact that socialists may not live up to their principles, seem to me to be no reason to abandon the house of socialism. Rather I should like to open it up to real human beings.”

The poverty of anti-Stalinism

In a 1990 article Robert Fine spelled out general lessons from what he had found in his research on the Trotskyist movement in South Africa, especially in the 1930s and 40s.

"I am not for setting up a dogmatic standard. On the contrary we must attempt to help the dogmatists make their dogma clear to themselves. Especially communism is a dogmatic abstraction" (Marx)

That Left and Right should find common ground on the issue of Stalinism has been a source of discomfort for a "negative" socialism which defines its politics in opposition to the Right rather than according to its own independent standards.

One of the driving forces behind the history of left apologetics for Stalinism has been a misplaced determination to avoid common ground with the anticommunism of the bourgeoisie establishment, whatever the justice of the case.

This attitude of mind has been a cause of great weakness for the Left.

The Right has its own good reason for being opposed to Stalinism, since Stalinist states and parties have a long and sometimes successful history of attacking the traditional capitalist classes and expropriating their property.

I am thinking of the destruction of the native bourgeoisie in the Soviet Union itself after 1929, in the Baltic republics and Finland in the early 1940s, in the Soviet-dominated east and central European states after the war and in a number of Third World countries in the 1960s and 1970s — in all of which cases some form of Stalinist model was adopted on the ashes of traditional bourgeois rule.

To this extent, the hostility of the Right to Stalinism, whatever its additional ideological justifications, has been entirely rational. Since Marxism and Stalinism have in common a seemingly "anti-capitalist" project, that is, a record of decisive inroads against capitalist private property, from the standpoint of the bourgeoisie this identity is far more important than any distinctions between them.

Marxism and Stalinism appear either as equivalent phenomena or at least as located on a continuum characterised by the "authoritarian" appropriation of capitalist private property.

From the standpoint of the working class, however, hostility to Stalinism derives not from its anti-capitalism but from its suppression of independent working class life. If for

the bourgeoisie the distinction between Stalinism and Marxism appears peripheral, for the working class it is everything.

For Stalinism represents not only "anti-capitalism" but also the disenfranchisement of the working class and the suppression of independent working class organisation; in short, the opposition of Stalinist states and parties to private property is accompanied by the crushing of political democracy and the freedoms of civil society.

Marxism aspires not merely to anti-capitalism but to a definite form of anti-capitalism which empowers the working class and democratises both the state and society to its roots.

The distinguishing feature of Stalinism lies in the reactionary form it gives to the "anti-capitalist" struggle: it represents the abrogation both of the particularity of bourgeois society (individuality, free will, civil liberties) in the name of the battle against egoism, and of the universality of bourgeois society (equal right, political democracy, universal suffrage) in the name of the class struggle.

Marxism by contrast represents the extension of bourgeois particularity and universality beyond the limits imposed by bourgeois society; to use Marx's own phrase, communism is the "positive supersession" of bourgeois property, law and state and not their "abstract negation". In this regard, in spite of their common commitment to "anti-capitalism", Marxism and Stalinism are mutually and inherently antagonistic.

When I write of what Marxism is, perhaps I should say what Marxism ought to be if, firstly, it followed the spirit of Marx's own critique and, second, it placed itself firmly in the camp of democracy. Unfortunately, this is not what "actually existing" Marxism — not just official communism but also many strands of independent Marxism — has often stood for. Its critical emphasis has typically been placed on the insufficiency of Stalinist "anti-capitalism" rather than on the surfeit of Stalinist anti-Marxism.

This attitude has been most visible in the interpretation of Stalinism as an essentially "rightist" political force, which is destined to compromise with capitalism and collaborate with the bourgeoisie, akin in most respects to the extreme right wing of the labour bureaucracy. This partial analysis finds its historical foundation in those periods in which Stalinist states and parties inside and out of Russia, have been ready to cooperate with sections of the established bourgeoisie against the more militant sections of the working class: I am thinking especially of the classic "popular front" periods of 1924-28, 1936-39, and 1941-47; we could then add the years of peaceful coexistence and market reforms after 1956, the advent of Eurocommunism and "historic compromise" in western Communist Parties in the late 1960s, and the present readiness of sections of the Stalinist bureaucracy to embrace the accumulation of private capital as a solution to their problems.

RIGHTIST

The existence of these "rightist" periods of Stalinism has led many Marxists to misconstrue Stalinism as essentially a force for class collaboration with the bourgeoisie, so that Stalinism came to signify at best an irresolute anti-capitalism and at worst a positive opposition to anti-capitalist politics

The Stalinist doctrine of "socialism in one country" was interpreted in this light as an abandonment of anti-capitalism outside of

the Soviet Union itself. The same characterisation of Stalinism as a "rightist" political force was shared by many Communists and Marxists who attached a positive meaning to popular frontism, idealising it as the "golden period" of Communist Party history, when the demands of international Communism were married to those of indigenous national movements and when Communists escaped from sectarian isolation in order to lead the struggles of the people as a whole.

Their rose-coloured retrospectives on the popular front have been amply criticised on the anti-Stalinist left², but the bitter fights between Stalinists and anti-Stalinists over the assessment of popular frontism obscure the common ground they share: namely that Stalinism is fundamentally designed for class collaboration.

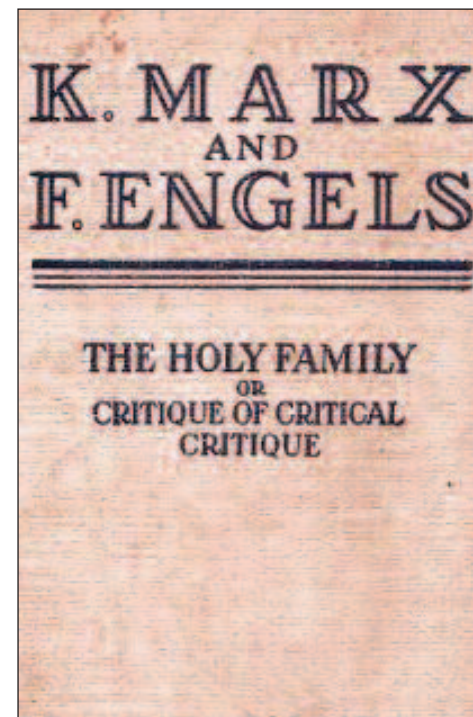
The identity of argument between supporters and critics of popular frontism consists in their common appraisal of the popular front as the kernel of the Communist-Stalinist tradition. We should add that the fog is further thickened when supporters of popular frontism have reserved the name of "Stalinism" for the left turns of the Communist Party and elevated popular fronts as the jewel of the "authentic Communist tradition".

The defect of this paradigm — I use the term to denote a mode of thought which contains different and opposing political judgements — is that it projects definite and limited periods of Communist politics, its so-called "right turns", as the essence of Stalinism. Consequently the "left turns" of Stalinism have either been ignored, repressed or assimilated in some other way to this model, for example, by interpreting them as the result of pressures from below on a reluctant Stalinist bureaucracy or seeing them as a temporary zigzag soon to be rectified.

It is not surprising that the Right has perceived the "anti-capitalist" aspect of Stalinism with much greater clarity than the left, since the traditional national bourgeoisie: have been its immediate victims. In seeking out the "quintessence" of Stalinism, the left definition of its leaning on and towards capitalism is but the obverse of the traditional bourgeois definition of its unrelenting anti-capitalism. Neither addresses the phenomenon as a whole.

For socialists caught up in this way of seeing Stalinism, periodic disorientation has followed each Stalinist turn to the left. On each occasion that Stalinist states and parties have both spoken the language of anti-capitalism and translated their word into deed, these socialists have been trapped by their own imagery: they have either denied reality, asserting that the Stalinists have not in fact moved against the bourgeoisie, or have treated the left turn as an inessential passing phase. When the reality of left Stalinism breaks through the constraints of this theoretical paradigm and forces itself on consciousness, socialists have been drawn to the entirely erroneous conclusion that the Stalinists have adopted the programme and policies of revolutionary socialism; interpreted on the left as a belated seeing of the revolutionary light and on the right as an ultra-left deviation.

Consequently, Marxists — the revolutionary wing of socialism — have turned themselves either into the extreme left wing of Stalinism, pushing for a quicker and yet more radical turn to the left, or into the democratic wing of Stalinism, pushing for a more humane, softer version of the same. The identification of Stalinism with class collaboration



Robert Fine emphasised the critical character of Marxist investigation

has led to both an inconsistent anti-Stalinism, overcritical of its right turns and undercritical of its left turns, and to an identification of "true" socialism with left Stalinism. By defining Stalinism as insufficiently anti-capitalist, the left presents itself as really anti-capitalist, as what we might call anti-anti-capitalist³.

Such has been the source of the Stalinisation of Marxism far beyond the confines of Stalinism itself and is the central problem of defining a Marxist response to the contemporary crisis of Stalinism. Marxism cannot be defined negatively; it is neither simply the negation of bourgeois forms of social life nor is it simply the negation of Stalinism. The slogan of "anti-capitalism, anti-Stalinism" may be a useful starting point for socialists, but is no substitute for the positive reformulation of Marxism.

One of the stock Marxist answers to the identification of Stalinism and socialism is to say that whatever Stalinism is, it is not socialism. Stalinism is counterposed either to the idea of socialism, the definition of which is given prior to the critique of Stalinism, or to the ideal realisation of socialism, which is usually located in the Russian revolution.

This line of argument inverts the procedure of investigation which is required: it sets socialism up as a dogmatic standard against which to measure Stalinism, whereas the proper method must be a criticism of Stalinism that is not afraid of its findings, even when these findings undermine our idea of socialism or our belief that we have beheld its ideal realisation.

It is through the critique of Stalinism that we reconstruct the ideal of socialism; it is not by positing socialism as a dogmatic abstraction that we complete our critique of Stalinism.

1. Karl Marx: letter to Arnold Ruge, September 1843.

2. See for example Leon Trotsky: *Problems of the Chinese Revolution*; Theodore Draper: *The History of the American Communist Party*; Felix Morrow: *Revolution and Counter-revolution in Spain*; George Orwell: *Homage to Catalonia*; Dan Guerin: *Front Populaire: Révolution Manquée*; Jacques Danos and Marcel Gibelin: *June 36: Class Struggle and The Popular Front in France*; and Robert Fine *Beyond Apartheid: Labour and Liberation In South Africa*.

3. To adapt a passage from Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses*.

• First published in *Workers' Liberty* 14, July 1990



Robert Fine's 1990 book discussed left politics in South Africa

Where we stand

Today one class, the working class, lives by selling its labour power to another, the capitalist class, which owns the means of production.

The capitalists' control over the economy and their relentless drive to increase their wealth causes poverty, unemployment, the blighting of lives by overwork, imperialism, the destruction of the environment and much else.

Against the accumulated wealth and power of the capitalists, the working class must unite to struggle against capitalist power in the workplace and in wider society.

The Alliance for Workers' Liberty wants socialist revolution: collective ownership of industry and services, workers' control, and a democracy much fuller than the present system, with elected representatives recallable at any time and an end to bureaucrats' and managers' privileges.

We fight for trade unions and the Labour Party to break with "social partnership" with the bosses and to militantly assert working-class interests.

In workplaces, trade unions, and Labour organisations; among students; in local campaigns; on the left and in wider political alliances we stand for:

- ✂ Independent working-class representation in politics.
- ✂ A workers' government, based on and accountable to the labour movement.
- ✂ A workers' charter of trade union rights — to organise, to strike, to picket effectively, and to take solidarity action.
- ✂ Taxation of the rich to fund decent public services, homes, education and jobs for all.
- ✂ A workers' movement that fights all forms of oppression. Full equality for women, and social provision to free women from domestic labour. For reproductive justice: free abortion on demand; the right to choose when and whether to have children. Full equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. Black and white workers' unity against racism.
- ✂ Open borders.
- ✂ Global solidarity against global capital — workers everywhere have more in common with each other than with their capitalist or Stalinist rulers.
- ✂ Democracy at every level of society, from the smallest workplace or community to global social organisation.
- ✂ Equal rights for all nations, against imperialists and predators big and small.
- ✂ Maximum left unity in action, and openness in debate.



If you agree with us, please take some copies of *Solidarity* to sell — and join us!

Events

Saturday 30 June

NHS at 70: Free, for all, forever
Noon, Portland Place, London,
W1A 1AA
bit.ly/2K8UQkB

Saturday 7 July

London Pride parade
11am, route TBC
bit.ly/2JNzKIQ

Friday 13 July

Protest Trump's visit
2pm, Portland Place, London,
W1A 1AA
bit.ly/2iUocaK

12-13 July

People, Pits & Politics Festival
Durham Town Hall, Market Place,
Durham DH1 3NE
bit.ly/2JZI33E

Saturday 14 July

Durham Miners' Gala
Various times, Durham
www.durhamminers.org/gala

Sunday 15 July

Momentum national conference
10am, Durham Town Hall, Market
Place, Durham DH1 3NE
bit.ly/2ta1tJt

Have an event you want listing? Email:
solidarity@workersliberty.org

More online at www.workersliberty.org Workers' Liberty @workersliberty

Grenfell campaigners united

By Clare Horner

Campaigners marked the anniversary of the Grenfell Tower fire with public demonstrations and resolute promises to fight for justice.

On Thursday 14 June, at least 12,000 people marched through Ladbrooke Grove on the silent walk that has commemorated the victims of the fire every month since the terrible fire, which cost 72 people their lives and directly affected thousands of others. Then on Saturday 16 June, the Justice for Grenfell campaign and the Fire Brigades Union organised a rally outside Downing Street to point the finger of blame where it ultimately belongs — with central government and its policies on social housing, austerity and deregulation.

Although the mood was understandably sombre, the silent march was characterised by deep solidarity between the diverse participants, who included the bereaved, survivors and residents of Grenfell, alongside firefighters, other workers and Labour Party members. The walk was led by young people and escorted by local bikers. Justice for Grenfell campaign placards, banners and a sea of green scarves set the tone of the silent walk.

Just past the tube station and the Westway flyover, firefighters formed a guard of honour in support of the walk, as they have done from the beginning. Hundreds queued to embrace firefighters, some of whom had intervened on the night of the fire. Local people recognised that firefighters were the only people on the night running towards the fire and played an incredible role in rescuing and evacuating as many people as they could.

This theme was taken up at the rally at Downing Street. Grenfell

residents and campaigners hit out at media attempts to divide those who were present on the night. They rejected the twisted logic of armchair commentators who blame firefighters for the fire, while excusing the negligence of the council, the TMO and the profiteers who put up the cladding that turned the single flat fire into an inferno. Grenfell campaigners made their feelings clear by chanting "Theresa May, we don't trust you — we trust the FBU".

INQUIRY

This week, the public inquiry resumes with some of the academic experts presenting their initial findings.

One report suggests that there was a window of opportunity in the first 45 minutes to evacuate residents, particularly after the fire had broken out of the flat of origin and spread up the East side of the building.

However other reports show some of the difficulties in carrying out a simultaneous evacuation: the lobbies and stairs were smoke logged, the stairs barely a metre wide, there was no central means of communication with residents. There were only about two dozen firefighters on scene at that stage, and they were trying to stop the fire spreading. There were many unknowns — the building could have housed 600 people (in fact it was half that number) and no one knew how many of those in the building were unable to move themselves and required assistance.

Firefighters faced an impossible situation. Advising people to get out could have sent more to certain death in toxic smoke. A panicked evacuation could have crushed dozens in narrow stairwells and trapped others from escaping. Almost all the fire safety measures

that should have been in place failed — windows and doors, the ventilation system and the lifts, the water supply and the gas — nothing worked as it was supposed to. And they faced a fire spread by dangerous cladding that never should have been installed and which ultimately caused those deaths.

The Grenfell Tower inquiry will take years to complete its work. Campaigners do not believe the ruling class will deliver justice. However this week underlined their determination to fight, both on the immediate issues of the fire but also against the systemic and institutional power structure that allowed this fire to happen. They will do that alongside workers, particularly the firefighters.

This is struggle every socialist should rally around.

Summer camp is 10-12 August

Come and join our now-legendary annual socialist summer getaway in beautiful Height Gate farm, above Hebden Bridge in West Yorkshire.

This will be a long weekend of music, campfires, food, drink, socialist discussions, workshops, tree climbing, and arsing about in the great outdoors — organised by the socialist group Workers' Liberty, but open to all!

NB we will be sleeping inside a building, a big farmhouse and barn, though there is also room for camping if you want to bring a tent.

More:
www.workersliberty.org/camp

Students call for left unity

By AWL students

Around seventy students attended the "We Are the University National Student Left Conference", hosted by the NCAFC in Sheffield on 16-17 June.

Activists from more than 30 different universities, some representing Labour Clubs and free education groups attended. Many became active through the occupations and other action in support of last term's UCU strike.

There was a sense of excitement about building on the upsurge of campus organising and using the momentum around it to renew the student movement.

In the weeks before the conference over 100 students, sabbatical officers and NUS officers signed a statement calling for the student left to unite around a clear set of

political demands to link up struggles on campus on a national scale, and bring them into NUS and Labour Students.

The closing plenary on Saturday voted to endorse this statement and discussed how to develop the initiative — the political issues the student left should organise around, and how to link up and spread existing campaigns like the student-worker solidarity and anti-outsourcing campaigns at the University of London, KCL and SOAS.

Participants wanted to campaign around free movement and migrants' rights, supporting workers' struggles and rent activism. A working group will take this forward into the next academic year.

The conference also held discussion and practical workshops, and debates, such as the extent to which Labour Party activists should be critical of the leadership. The Women and Non-Binary caucus re-

solved to campaign for abortion rights in Northern Ireland and for buffer zones around abortion clinics, to organise demonstrations at Yarl's Wood and other detention centres. Plans were made for a speaker tour around reproductive freedoms and sex workers' rights, and to host a feminist conference.

On Sunday NCAFC members voted to organise a left wing, pro-migrant intervention into the NUS's anti-Brexit campaign, including calling for a radical, pro-freedom of movement block at the NUS first term demonstration.

Members also voted to support and work with the newly-formed UCU Rank and File Network to fight for a democratic, militant UCU, and to run campaigns, meetings, actions and debates at universities across the country around the slogan "cops off campus".

DOO disputes at crossroads

By a rail worker

There have been some significant developments since we last covered the mainline railway Driver Only Operation disputes.

At Greater Anglia, RMT says the employer has made an “improved offer” good enough to be put to its members in a referendum, so it has suspended strike action there.

At South Western Railway, RMT has also suspended its strikes on Thursday and Saturday because it says its talks with the employer at ACAS are making “adequate progress” and it believes an acceptable settlement can be reached.

At Merseyrail the discussions at ACAS remain ongoing, with nothing whatsoever making its way into the news about progress. Whilst it is unwise to speculate too much, it would appear that a settlement is likely to arise from those discussions in due course.

At Northern the union remains in dispute over DOO, with strikes taking place on 19, 21, 23 June. Since the introduction of new timetables on 20 May, the company has been struggling to run all its services, with numbers of cancellations shockingly high. There has been considerable media and political pressure on the company, on



Southern (where the new timetables are a similar mess) and on Chris Grayling and the Department for Transport. Some people at RMT believe that Grayling was on the brink of being forced to resign, and Arriva Rail North was on the verge of defaulting on the Northern franchise.

However, the company approached drivers’ union ASLEF, cap in hand, asking to be bailed out with an agreement for drivers to work overtime on Rest Days. This included a £1000 payment for every driver just for making the agreement, with no obligation on any individual to actually agree to work any overtime. The agreement also included some promises for “meaningful talks” on a “new deal” for its drivers, and promises

for further payments when certain conditions have been met that will allow the company to move forward with some of its plans for modernising rolling stock.

It is difficult to see why ASLEF chose to settle for so little when they had the company and government over a barrel in this way.

There is also a concern that this may be a step down the road of that union agreeing to work trains under DOO arrangements.

One of the conditions set out for the receipt of further payment is the agreement of a training plan for drivers for the company’s new and refurbished trains, which will be equipped with the necessary controls to operate that way.

Tube drivers in strike ballot

By Ollie Moore

Driver members of the RMT union on London Underground’s Piccadilly Line are currently balloting for industrial action, with the vote due to close on Thursday 21 June.

The dispute has been prompted by what the union calls a complete “breakdown in industrial relations”, with management adopting an increasingly disciplinarian and authoritarian approach, including obstructing union reps from carrying out basic trade union duties. The RMT says that Piccadilly Line management has also failed to honour agreements made in previous disputes.

Driver-only union Aslef is also balloting its Piccadilly Line membership; its ballot will not close until July. Should RMT’s ballot meet the threshold requirements and return



a majority for strikes, a discussion will need to be had amongst RMT reps and activists around whether the union should wait for Aslef’s ballot to close, in order to coordinate potential action, or launch action of its own using the momentum of its own ballot.

A separate joint RMT-Aslef dispute on the Jubilee Line seems close to a settlement, with two planned strikes being suspended after LU management agreed not to increase weekend working for drivers on the line.

Traffic wardens strike

By Gemma Short

Traffic wardens in Hackney will strike for six days beginning at 00:01 on Monday 9 July.

The traffic wardens, employed by APOCA Parking, are organised by Unite. They previously struck

for 48 hours from Monday 14 May. Unite has put in a claim for a cost of living pay increase of five percent. Workers are also fighting back against unfair implementation of sickness procedures, and unfair and potentially discriminatory implementation of the annual holiday allocation. Unite is also ar-

guing for APOCA to agree to yearly pay negotiations, as happen in local government, with the aim of accounting for cost of living increases every year.

The 14 May strike caused significant disruption to parking in Hackney, and dented APOCA’s parking ticket revenue.

400 at meeting of new Unison left

By a delegate

Unison conferences met between 17-22 June in Brighton.

There was a Unison Action broad left meeting on Tuesday 19 June, which had about 400 people.

The organisation is relatively new and has little organisation so far, but the large meeting was a good start. We want a movement which can challenge the leadership for NEC positions and build a rank and file base. We don’t have it yet.

The only controversy in the National Delegate Conference so far, as I wrote on 20 June, has been on a motion from the union Executive Committee (NEC) marking the 25th anniversary of the Union which amounted to a power grab — centralising control within HQ from branches and moving the union away from being a lay-led union.

The motion contained little definite itself but would cause other motions to fall which gave guarantees or made changes to keep or redirect power to branches from HQ.

A review of UNISON’s structures and practices needs to be done in an own, transparent way by involving rank and file members rather than the leadership and their “preferred” people. The motion was vague and gave no specifics about how the review would be carried out, just the areas that it wanted to look at

CHAIR

The hand vote at conference appeared to be about 60% against the motion, but the chair ruled that the motion had been carried.

After about 10 minutes of confusion and with objections from the floor a card vote was called and the motion fell by 214,000 delegate votes.

The general feeling in the conference in general is pretty angry about Tory austerity, and optimistic about a Labour government. Many members are also

angry about what they see as a failure of the leadership of the union to take action, or in blocking action sometimes, particularly in Further Education (a motion on this is due later on the agenda).

Local Government conference (on 17-18 June, before NDC on 19-22) was pretty dull. There were no real contentions motions. One motion from the Service Group Executive, which has moved left over the past year, was ruled out of order for mentioning of industrial action, but due to union rules we do not know what that motion was about.

The drift left by the SGE reflects the anger of rank and file activists and an awareness that Unison’s lack of fight that Unison has caused it to lose thousands of members.

The general opinion of the conference was that we can only retain and build membership by defending members more militantly in the workplace and fighting austerity. However motions contained few specifics.

A motion passed calling on the NEC to call a joint health and social care one-day conference to allow members in those areas to meet and coordinate work.

SECTORS

The areas currently sit in different “sectors” of the union.

The motion was then defeated at National Delegate Conference when the NEC argued that it was an “unnecessary talking shop”.

General Secretary Dave Prentis talked left in his conference address — he claimed to be a Corbyn supporter from the start despite his and the Union leadership’s preferred candidate at the time being Yvette Cooper. He also talked about Unison as a left union, as a union which was a thorn in the side of New Labour which is blatantly not true.

That shows the union leadership are afraid of a resurgent union membership, so are talking left to please and placate members, but not carrying out anything radical.

Wigan outsourcing strikes

By Gemma Short

Workers in Warrington, Wigan and Leigh NHS foundation trust will strike again for 24 hours beginning at 00:01 on Wednesday 27 June and for five days beginning at 06:00 hours on Thursday 28 June in a dispute over outsourcing plans.

Hospital caterers, cleaners, porters, and other workers, members of Unison, previously struck for 48 hours on Wednesday 23 and Thursday 24 May. As previously re-

ported in *Solidarity*, Warrington, Wigan and Leigh NHS foundation trusts plan to outsource workers to a new company called WWL Solutions. The trusts claim they need to do the outsourcing to save money. However a recent staff newsletter quoted trust chief executive Andrew Foster saying it has recorded a “bottom line” surplus of £8.6m.

Workers are concerned that being outsourced makes their jobs less secure, and open to changes in pay and terms and conditions in the future.



TAX THE RICH TO PAY FOR THE NHS

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